

The most amazing thing about the battle of Jericho is that there was no battle of Jericho. I'm not saying the events of Joshua 6 didn't happen. I'm simply saying that the game was rigged, the outcome predetermined. This was no contest. Josh. 6 begins this way, "The LORD said to Joshua, "Now Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in. See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king *and* the valiant warriors." (Josh. 6:1-2).

The real battle of Jericho had less to do with overwhelming a city and everything to do with overcoming doubt and unbelief. **The real obstacle was not the walls of Jericho, but the walls of unbelief.** The real battle was spiritual in nature, not physical. Will God's people obey the Lord and go forward or will they waver in unbelief?

Let's read the story...6:3-7. Jericho was an imposing fortress. There was a retaining wall 12-16 ft. high. Above that, they found another wall, the outer wall of the city, that was 6 ft. thick and 20-26 ft. high. Then, some 46 ft. up the embankment was the inner wall that was roughly the same ht. as the outer wall. So they were looking up at the city that was perched at least ten stories above them. Let's keep reading...6:8-16; 20.

The story of Jericho strains our rational minds. First there's the unorthodox strategy. How do you explain how 6-foot-thick walls can come down by people yelling at them? Then there is the inexplicable command to kill the inhabitants of Jericho. How do you explain why Rahab the prostitute was spared for lying to her king while all the people of Jericho were utterly destroyed? Did God order the ethnic cleansing of an entire race of people? vv. 17, 21. It seems that God has some explaining to do.

Joshua 6 serves as an example of what God does again and again in redemption history. His methodology often assaults our human intellect and insults our human pride. That's the real battle of Jericho. It takes place in our soul every single day. There are two competing forces battling for every human heart. One force encourages us to trust God and the other encourages us to trust our own human inclination. All of us come face to face with the walls of Jericho. If you are going to be used by God in furthering His purposes on the earth, then there are some formidable walls that have to come down. These walls have been erected in order to keep God out. What are some of the mental fortresses that stand between us and God?

1. Religions are the same. Open-minded people know that all religions are the same basically. They just use different terminology or names for God. That's the premise of a new CNN special airing tonight called "Believers." The commercial makes it clear that the program will endorse a tolerant pluralistic approach to religion. The commercial says, "Faith is mysterious. It's indescribable. And religion is just a language you use to describe your faith. Although we're all speaking different languages, we're all saying pretty much the same thing. Religion is about who you are, how you see yourself, your world; that's what it means to say 'I am Christian,' 'I am Muslim,' 'I am Jewish,' 'I am Buddhist,' 'I am Hindu.' These are far more statements of identity than they are statements of faith." In other words, if we can all agree not to take our religion too seriously then we will learn to live together harmoniously.

When I read the words of that commercial I thought of a clever essay that captures the spirit of our age called "Creed" by Steve Turner.

We believe there's something in horoscopes, UFO's and bent spoons. Jesus was a good man just like Buddha, Mohammed, and ourselves. He was a good moral teacher though we think His good morals were bad.

We believe that all religions are basically the same-at least the one that we read was. They all believe in love and goodness. They only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation.

We believe that after death comes Nothing because when you ask the dead what happens they say nothing. If death is not the end, if the dead have lied, then its compulsory heaven for all except perhaps Hitler, Stalin, and Genghis Kahn.

We believe that man is essentially good. It's only his behavior that lets him down. This is the fault of society. Society is the fault of conditions. Conditions are the fault of society.

We believe that each man must find the truth that is right for him. Reality will adapt accordingly. The universe will readjust. History will alter.

We believe that there is no absolute truth except for the truth that there is no absolute truth.

The idea that all religions are the same is contradicted by historical evidence. Canaanite religion involved despicable practices like sodomy, incest, bestiality, temple prostitution, even child sacrifice. That is why God issues this command to the Israelites. "When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering." Dt. 18:9-10. These practices are incompatible with human flourishing.

If the people of Canaan were like our pleasant, peace-loving, civilized neighbors who practice a different religion from us but work in our colleges, hospitals, and fire departments, then the claim that God condemns those people as hopelessly degenerate would be rightly questioned. But what if you discovered your neighbors were practicing incest or bestiality or prostitution and publicly sacrificing children by burning them alive? Would that be enough justification to judge their actions? Or would you say, "We should be open-minded about these things? We shouldn't force our views on other people. That's bigoted and intolerant."

"In view of the corrupting influence of the Canaanite religion, especially with its religious prostitution ... and infant sacrifice, it was impossible for pure faith and worship to be maintained in Israel except by the complete elimination of the Canaanites themselves" (*A Survey of Old Testament Introduction.*) Chicago: Moody Press, 1964, p. 261). Gleason Archer

2. Morality is relative. There is no right or wrong. It's all relative. Sin is just another word for making mistakes. We all make mistakes therefore we should not be judgmental about sin. But God takes sin seriously. It is an affront to His holiness and a violation of His nature and purpose. For example, God is love, so prostitution, child sacrifice, exploiting the others for the sake of personal gain, these are all contrary to the nature of a loving God. Sin is the source of human pain and suffering.

The destruction of the Canaanites was not an attack on innocent people. It was God's judgment of sin and evil. Deut 9:4 affirmed that God would "drive out" the Canaanites "on account of the wickedness of these nations." Those who would not either change their behavior or move out of the land were to be destroyed not just to make a place for Israel but to judge their wickedness. But Moses warned Israel, "Do not say in your heart after the Lord your God has thrust them out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you, and that he may confirm the word which he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Dt. 9:4-5

All the way back in Genesis, God forewarned Abraham that he would not put up with the wickedness of the Canaanites and Amorites forever. "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." Gen. 15:13-16

God had endured the idolatry and sins of these wicked nations for centuries. He waited 400 years to allow the Amorites to repent and worship the God of Israel. "When Yahweh finally sends Joshua in to purge the land, should we say, 'How cruel God is!' Or should we say, 'It's about time! Why did it take so long?'" (Peter Leithart, *First Things*, "Sin of Amorites"). The appointed instrument of God's judgment was the army of Israel. This does not mean that Israel's motive was always holy. At times it was not. There will come a time when God will expel His own people from the land because they adopted the practices of the Canaanites. But the just purposes of God were being carried out, even if Israel at times had wrong motives.

3. Judgment is passe. We should not judge others therefore a good God wouldn't judge people. There will be no "day of judgment." There was a time when people worried that something they did might become part of their "permanent record." There is no longer a "permanent record."

The Bible reveals that one day God's wrath will explode against this world with such fierceness people will call out for the rocks and the mountains to crush them rather than face the wrath of the Lamb. We are warned about this through the words of the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10. "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels, He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power on the day He comes to be glorified in His holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed."

The kind of judgment Paul is talking about is demonstrated in Joshua 6. Why all the sevens in this chapter? There were seven priests, seven trumpets, seven days, seven circuits of the wall on the seventh day. In the Bible the number seven often symbolizes completeness. This was signaling that there would be a complete destruction of Jericho. Joshua even pronounced a curse on anyone who would refortify the city by rebuilding **its foundations** or **its gates**...6:26.

This prohibition was not violated until the days of King Ahab, 500 years later. The Bible presents this as an indication of the apostasy of that period. "And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him...In his days Hiel of Bethel built Jericho. He laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua the son of Nun." 1 Kings 16:31, 34.

But the number seven is also the number associated with creation. They are marching round seven times to produce an un-creation. As God establishes His kingdom, He will destroy or undo everything that stands in the way.

4. God seems unloving. At least the God of the OT does. I don't understand how THIS God, the God of the OT who seems angry, vindictive and blood thirsty is so different from the God of the NT revealed in Jesus as loving, kind and gracious. How is this God who wipes people out any better than other gods that condone or even command the taking of innocent life?

First, this was a command to Joshua at a particular point in history. This was not a mandate for Israel to operate this way at all times and in all places.

Secondly, what God commanded was the gradual expulsion of these tribes to eliminate idolatry from the land not some sort of xenophobic genocide. This was not trying to create a racially pure people. God always welcomed the "stranger" or "alien." In fact, Lev. 19 commanded, "You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." Lev. 19:34.

We have already established the fact that the Canaanites were not "innocent." They were wicked. But even so, I want you to see that God gives both men and nations time and opportunity to repent of their sin. The Amorites despised God's goodness and longsuffering by refusing to repent. When we are told in 6:1 that Jericho was "shut up" they closed the door on God's salvation. The Old Testament indicates that if a city opened up its gates and pled for mercy, then mercy it would receive.

God ordered the people to circle Jericho every day for six days and then seven times on the seventh day. Why? Because He was appealing to them to repent and be saved. It must have been a frightening sight. Unfortunately, the scene has often been portrayed this way:

"Every day they were exposing themselves to ridicule and danger. A Jericho soldier may have looked down from the wall on the army of Israel and asked, "Do they think they can frighten us into surrender by the sound of their rams' horns?" And the rest may have joined in a loud chorus of raucous laughter." (Bible Knowledge Commentary) Do you think they would have been laughing at the sight of 600,000 fighting men circling 10 acres?

Rahab serves as an example of God's grace...6:17b, 25. Excavations show that there is only one place where the walls remained intact. I'm guessing that's where Rahab lived!

Finally, God's ways, no matter how mysterious are superior to man's ways. **The arrogance of man is no match for the supremacy of God.**

He is supreme over everything...over all galaxies and endless reaches of space.

Over the earth from the top of Mount Everest 29,000 feet up, to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean 36,000 feet down into the Mariana Trench.

Over all plants and animals, from the peaceful Blue Whale to the microscopic killer viruses.

Over all weather and movements of the earth: hurricanes, tornadoes, monsoons, earthquakes, avalanches, floods, snow, rain, sleet

Over all chemical processes that heal and destroy: cancer, AIDS, malaria, flu, and all the workings of antibiotics and a thousand healing medicines

Over all countries and all governments and all armies

Over Al Qaeda and ISIS and all terrorists and kidnappings and suicide bombings and beheadings

Over all politics and elections and the media and news and entertainment and sports and leisure

Over all education and universities and scholarship and science and research.

As Abraham Kuyper once said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'" And though it may not seem so now, it is only a matter of time until he is revealed from heaven in flaming fire to give relief to those who trust him and righteous vengeance on those who don't.

What walls need to come down in your life? What keeps you from believing? What keeps you from obeying? Is it that you don't understand? Do you feel like God owes you an explanation? Could it be that He has been circling your life just waiting for you to open your hear to Him?

The decisive moment in this military campaign came at the end of chapter 5 when Joshua came face to face with Jesus in the form of a man brandishing a sword. "Are you for us or for our adversaries." The answer - "No. I am the Commander of the Lord's army." The implication - I don't work for you. You work for me. Joshua had to learn not to ask, "How is God going to help me accomplish my objective?" Or, "How is God going to fit into my plans?" The only question is, "How am I going to fit into God's plan and contribute to His purpose? God is not required to accommodate Himself to us but we are required to accommodate ourselves to His purposes. Open your heart and allow Jesus to govern your life. He is patient but He will not wait forever. He came to earth the first time as our Savior. He promised to return only next time He will be our Judge.